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SUBJECT: RWANDAN RESPONSE TO FRENCH JUDGE'S ARREST WARRANTS

REF: KIGALI 1110

¶1. (U) In response to press reports that a French judge had requested arrest warrants for nine senior GOR officials allegedly involved in the downing of the Juvenal Habyarimana presidential jet on April 6, 1994, the GOR on November 21 formally denied its officials' involvement. "There is no basis whatsoever to these allegations," said a Foreign Ministry statement. The statement accused the French government of attempting to "intimidate Rwanda using strong arm tactics" and to "hide the truth of France's involvement in the Genocide." Further, by the issuance of arrest warrants, the French government intended to "pre-empt the findings" of a GOR Commission investigating France's role in events of 1994 and before: "France actively supported the Genocide and armed and fought alongside the forces that committed the genocide."

¶2. (U) In front-page remarks to the New Times government newspaper, Justice Minister Tharcisse Karugarama suggested that the request for international arrest warrants by the French judge was a "political" act, not in keeping with international norms, and done to "harass" and "intimidate" the Rwandan government. "It is totally strange and very absurd that a foreign judge can issue an indictment" aimed at foreign leaders, for acts committed in "their own country." Karugarama suggested as well that the French government meant to forestall the investigations of the Rwandan Commission on French involvement in the genocide.

¶3. (SBU) At the opening session of the sixth annual Rwanda and Development Partners Meeting on November 22, before an audience of hundreds of diplomats, representatives of local and international NGOs, and senior GOR officials, President Kagame deviated from his welcoming remarks to harshly castigate the French government. France was practicing a "justice of bullies," he said, and offering an "arrogant" face to the GOR. Kagame did not address the substance of the French judge's claims, nor the judge's reported recommendation that Kagame himself be prosecuted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for his own supposed involvement in the destruction of the Habyarimana jet. Some time later, at the mid-morning coffee break in tents on the lawn outside the hotel, Kagame appeared deep in conversation with French Ambassador Dominique Decherf.

¶4. (SBU) In conversation with our DATT, also on November 22, senior GOR military officers expressed little concern over prospective travel plans, dismissing rumors circulating that Chief of Defense Staff James Kabarebe, reportedly one of the nine subject to the French arrest warrants, had postponed travel to Cameroon (in fact the DATT saw Kabarebe at the

airport yesterday, proceeding to his scheduled flight).

15. (SBU) Comment. The GOR has reacted with fury and condemnation, dismissing out of hand the French judge's attempt to secure the appearance of Rwandan officials at his inquiry into the shooting down of the Habyarimana plane. We cannot judge the legality or appropriateness of the attempt, but the depth of anger on the part of the Rwandan government is palpable. The GOR is dismayed by the timing of the action of the French judge, coming just after President Kagame completed successful visits to China and Europe. In particular, Kagame just finished high level meetings with the EU in Brussels, including meetings with High Representative Javier Solana, which highlighted positive economic relations. Coupled with the recent letter to the ICTR by Paul Rusesabagina requesting investigation of RPF offenses during and after the genocide (reftel), the GOR is feeling that once again "negative forces" are seeking to undercut its reputation and achievements. End comment.

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